

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

OxyContin FAQs

What is OxyContin? OxyContin is a prescription painkiller used for mild to moderate pain control, chronic pain, and the treatment of pain related to cancer and other debilitating conditions. The active ingredient in OxyContin is oxycodone, which has effects similar to that of heroin (for more information on oxycodone, see the April 2000 *DEWS Alert*). OxyContin is a time-released drug that contains a much larger amount of oxycodone than similar painkillers (such as Percocet and Percodan). It comes in tablet form and when taken orally remains effective over a 12-hour time span. Oxycodone is a schedule II controlled substance on the federal level and in Maryland.

How is OxyContin abused? OxyContin abusers either chew the tablets, crush them and snort them, or dilute them in water and inject them. By snorting or injecting, an abuser feels the potent effects of the drug in a short time, rather than over a 12-hour span.

What are the effects of OxyContin use? OxyContin is a central nervous system depressant. The drug stimulates the opioid receptors in the central nervous system and brings about effects ranging from analgesia to respiratory depression to euphoria. With prolonged use individuals become tolerant, require larger doses, and can become physically dependent. Overdoses can cause convulsions, coma, and death.

Who is abusing OxyContin? Abuse of OxyContin is most heavily concentrated in eastern states, including Maryland. Because OxyContin's pharmacological effects are similar to those of heroin, it attracts a similar abuser population. OxyContin may be more attractive than heroin to some users because an insurance provider may cover the cost of the drug—a 40-mg pill costs approximately \$4 by prescription. Conversely, the National Drug Intelligence Center reports that OxyContin abusers who cannot obtain the drug by prescription may begin to use heroin because heroin is less expensive than OxyContin sold on the street.

How is OxyContin obtained? OxyContin is diverted for abuse in a number of ways. Pharmacy robberies have been reported in several states. The drug is also obtained by stealing it from someone with a legal prescription or by forging prescriptions. "Doctor shopping" is another method of obtaining the drug—individuals (with or without legitimate ailments) visit numerous doctors to receive prescriptions for the drug.

What are the street names for OxyContin? Street names for OxyContin include oxy, OC, oxycotton, and killer.

SOURCE: A complete list of informational sources is available on the CESAR website (<http://www.cesar.umd.edu/www2root/prod/csrfax/fax10/cfax-v10.htm>).